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KYRGYZSTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Food for the Soil

A Group of Agro-businessmen are Working to Reclaim the Bounty of Their Land and Increase the Productivity of Farms in Southern Kyrgyzstan



Photo by: Nodir Badalov, IFDC/KAED

This Jer Azygy member displays several varieties of potatoes at the first annual "Silk Road" Ferghana Valley International AgroExpo, which was held by Jer Azygy members with assistance from USAID and IFDC in late 2004.

Through the support of USAID and IFDC, members of Jer Azygy have been able to improve the business and horticultural practices of farming communities in Ferghana Valley and across Kyrgyzstan.

The break-up of the Soviet Union was especially hard on rural communities in Central Asia. Rural farmers in the valleys of Kyrgyzstan saw their yields drop and markets disappear. They had limited knowledge of modern agricultural practices, and no access to the technology necessary to implement them. In 2002, USAID/CAR's Kyrgyz Agro-Input Enterprise Development Project established the Jer Azygy Association of Agro-businessmen of Kyrgyzstan (Jer Azygy) to help reverse the sad legacy of Kyrgyzstan's agricultural sector.

In Kyrgyz, "Jer Azygy" means "food for the soil," but this organization has done much more than improve soil quality. Jer Azygy provides farmers with services and information on modern technologies, creates conditions for the production of high yields, and contributes to an increase of living standards in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. Much of their expertise has been gained through in-country and international training programs developed and implemented by USAID/CAR's Participant Training Program. These events have enabled Jer Azygy to adapt international best practices to their particular agricultural, cultural, and economic environment in Central Asia.

As a result of these study tours and related trainings, ten Jer Azygy members opened stores to retail a wide range of fertilizers and seeds, many of which were not available a few short years ago. The selection available at the stores helps local farmers to increase their yield and increases the productivity of the nutrient-deprived soil. Six Jer Azygy members hired professional agronomists to advise customers in their farm supply stores. Other members of the agribusiness association formulated contracts with western companies, importing fertilizer and exporting seeds and produce.

Taking advantage of these study tours has helped to create a strong image for the Jer Azygy Association, which has attracted the attention of more than 30 international input companies from 16 countries around the world. The organization has taken advantage of its trainings to make a comfortable transition into the Information Age. Its monthly newsletter was adapted into a newspaper and branded with a new title, *Agribusiness Monthly*. Jer Azygy closely worked with USAID on developing a website, www.aak.org.kg.

With the help of these USAID-administered programs, Jer Azygy now possesses the most up-to-date information on agro technology in Central Asia, and its influence is spreading far beyond those directly exposed to its programs. The association currently boasts 126 dues-paying members, and through the day-to-day operation of its farm stores, numerous television interviews, and a series of village meetings, it has reached—and helped—thousands of farmers and their families. The innovative agro-businessmen of Jer Azygy, with the help of USAID and IFDC, an International Center for Soil Fertility and Agricultural Development, are making great strides towards the modernization of agribusiness in Kyrgyzstan.